

# Heterosexual Nationalism: Discourses on Masculinity and Femininity

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Received: July 9, 2018

Accepted: October 12, 2018

Available online: October 18, 2018

doi:10.11114/ijsss.v6i11.3416

URL: <https://doi.org/10.11114/ijsss.v6i11.3416>

## Abstract

When control over women's sexuality always remain the base for nation state and national identity this research would tries to argue that it is not just about the control over women's sexuality but by giving prominence to an ideal form of sexuality that it regulates other possible forms of sexuality too. This paper strives to look at how by producing and reproducing particular sexuality and gender as normal, acceptable and essential, a community of nation-state redefined the private realm to ensure and maintained the hegemony of dominant groups and unequal power relations and vice-versa? It also look at the relationship between compulsory heterosexuality (or hetronormativity), procreative sex and nation-state? What role does compulsory heterosexuality play in the making of nation-state? How naturalization/legitimization of only one form of sexuality leads to delegitimation of other possible forms of sexualities.

**Keywords:** nationalism, compulsory heterosexuality, femininity, masculinity, domination, construction of the 'other'

## 1. Introduction

The scholarship on nation and gender has explored the significance attributed to control over women's sexuality in the process of nation building. This paper emphasizes on the point that it is not only control over women's sexuality but also over men's sexuality that is central to the discourse of nationalism. A reproductive body as a norm (therefore heterosexuality) always remain in the center/or in the process of nation building. In other words, the reproductive body is a notion that gives strength to heteronormativity which ground the process of nation building. Heterosexual nationalism is constructed by maintaining, sustaining and reinforcing the ideas of masculinity and femininity resting on the principal of inequality and difference between them through various cultural practices (Davis, 1997).

This paper emphasizes on intertwining of discourses on nationalism, gender and sexuality are interrelated to each other. This paper will discuss the role of normative status of heterosexuality within nationalism and how it has become dominant and normal form of sexuality and how the body plays an important role in the construction of "otherness" which is a principal idea of nationalism and therefore the exclusion of this 'other', presented as threat to a culture, community and nation building (Nagel, 2005).

This paper is divided into five sections. The first section locates the inter-relations between gender, sexuality and nationalism. The second section explores the significance of construction of womanhood for the idea of nation building. The control over women's reproductive body is crucial for the process of nation-building. The third section on 'masculinity and nationalism' locates masculinity in the formation of nationalism. The fourth section on 'masculinity, femininity and nationalism' analyses the interconnectedness between three. The last section on 'body, sexuality and otherness' explore the instrumentality of body and sexuality in constructing the internal "otherness" in colonial India and how the discourse of nationalism is grounded in body, sexuality and otherness.

## 2. Gender, Sexuality and Nation

Nationalism, gender and sexuality - all three categories are socially and culturally constructed and they play an important role in constructing one another by invoking and helping to construct the "us" versus "them" distinction and the exclusion of other (Mayer 2000 and RadaIvekovic 2004). In other words they constructed in opposition (or sometimes in relationship which is not binary) to other and all of them involve power relationship.

Nation, gender and sexuality are always in the constant process of becoming, correlating "masculinity" with men and "femininity" with women in a national context could in due course alter if either the discourse of nation or that of gender and sexuality changes. 'Intersections of nation, gender and sexuality is a discourse about a 'moral code', which mobilizes men to become its sole protectors and women its biological and symbolic reproducers' (Mayer 2000, p. 4-6).

These essential roles of two genders results in the construction of nation as heterosexual.

The relationship between gender, sexuality and nation and their interdependence can be understood in the quotation “Healthy Mother, Healthy Child, Healthy Nation” which is usually seen flashing on our television screens for promoting the health policies of the government. This reflects the importance of gender and sexuality in the process of nation building in which women’s role is defined as mothers or as biological reproducers and symbols of fertility and chastity.

A central aspect of regulating sexualities is to determine what counts as normal and what counts as abnormal. As Foucault suggest that this regulation has less to do with repression and is more about determining the differences between normal and abnormal. Normalization of sexuality and its linkages with nationalism and the state can be explored by looking at how “respectable sexuality” is defined. The essential connection between respectable sexuality and nationalism is that ideals or customs of dominant groups are recognized as national ideals, and are socially and legally imposed though unevenly. The supposed abnormal or deviant is the other side of respectable sexuality. What is to be noted is the fact that the definitions of normality and deviance often correspond to heterosexuality and homosexuality. The crucial point is the mutual dependence of these divisions of normal and abnormal sexualities, i.e. respectable and deviant sexualities, or the heterosexual and the homosexual. Probing these divisions more prudently will throw light on the manner in which nationalisms and nation states privilege certain forms of sexualities while devaluing others (Puri, 2004, p. 153).

Mosse (1985) explores the interdependence of nationalism and sexuality across modern Germany and England. He convincingly argues that ‘nationalisms are connected to notions of respectability, meaning “decent and correct” manners, which refer to decorum as well as modesty, purity, and the practice of virtue, morals, and proper attitudes toward sexuality’. Though conventional standards of behavior have been present throughout history, it was in the nineteenth century that the concept of respectability became the dominant mode of understanding the human body and sexuality. Specially amongst the middle classes, respectability enabled to uphold portico of high standing and self-respect, setting them apart from both the working classes and the aristocracy. He argues that by the beginning of the twentieth century, respectability was no longer confined to the middle classes and got decisively engrained across various social levels in Germany. Nationalism served as the instrument for the spread of sexual respectability. The middle-class status markers were reinvented as national cultural tradition and ideals to be engrossed by all classes in Germany. In their efforts to maintain national sexual respectability, nationalists also felt bound to delineate normal and abnormal sexuality. The modest manifestation of normal sexuality meant ‘reproduction, elimination of non-reproductive sexual practices, and promotion of moral and physical health’. Therefore, the essence of ‘sexual normality’ laid in particular forms of heterosexuality, meant to support the national struggle for survival by reproducing morally and physically fit persons. Consequently, non-procreative sexual practices, depravities that were seen as mining a man’s strength or virility, or practices that led to his physical or moral weakness were defined as sexual abnormality. Within this framework. homosexuality and masturbation were seen as the nub of sexual deviance and against the interests of the nation (as cited in Puri, 2004).

### 3. Femininity and Nationalism

Davis (1997, p.7-8) have identified five ways in which women have tended to participate in ethnic, national and state processes and practices : (a) as biological producers of members of ethnic collectivities; (b) as reproducers of the [normative] boundaries of ethnic/national groups [by enacting proper feminine behaviour]; (c) as participating centrally in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and as transmitters of its culture; (d) as signifiers of ethnic/national differences; and (e) as participant in national, economic, political and military struggles. These categorizations very clearly suggest that ‘nations are gendered and the topography of the nation is mapped in gendered terms (feminized soil, landscapes and boundaries and masculine movement over these spaces)’. National mythologies draw on traditional gender roles and the nationalist narrative is filled with images of the nation as mother, wife and maiden. Practices of nation building employ social constructions of masculinity and femininity that supports a division of labor in which women reproduce the nation physically and symbolically and men protect, defend and avenge the nation (RadaIvekovic & Mostov, 2004).

The literature on nation and nationalism in India highlight the ways in which women have been and continued to be central to the project of the nation. Not only are they the biological reproducers of future citizens but also reproducers of the boundaries of national groups and carriers of cultural tradition. This section explores the relationship of women’s gender identity with nation. Women were the symbols of cultural purity in colonial India and they were reduced to their bodies as either mothers or sexed objects to be regulated and protected from the outsiders. The recasting of women in colonial India has been central to the re-formation of castes and classes. The ideal woman was constructed as ‘pure’ in distinction with not only the western women but also the women of the laboring classes and lower castes (Rege, 2003, p. 339).

The significance of the symbolic category of ‘woman’ to the nationalist movement can be understood with regard to

nationalist necessity to assert to be representative of a unified India (Bjorkert 2006, p. 46). The construct of self-sacrificing mother was fundamental to the definition of 'Indian womanhood'. This construct of 'Indian womanhood' was an essential symbol through which the cultural disparity with the West could be posited. In her study of nationalist movement in Bombay region Gail Pearson identifies three aspects which were crucial to the nationalist project. Firstly, women were a source of cohesiveness to the nationalist movement because 'woman' as a category was 'undifferentiated in public consciousness' and was the lone universal category transcending all divisions and might imply all things to all persons. Secondly, the impression of 'sacred womanhood' was used by the nationalists to prove the worthless character of the British rulers and to stimulate the nationalist sentiments of the masses at large. Thirdly, women's participation was necessary for effectual forms of resistance such as the boycott of foreign cloth and the picketing of shops (as cited in Rege, 2003).

Minault asserts that the notion of 'extended family' and the 'nation as family' were used so that the public activities could appear as natural extensions of household roles, facilitating women to come out from their homes. She has made a distinction between the views held by liberal nationalists and cultural nationalists on the position of women. The liberals argued for social and educational reforms for women that would facilitate reforming of the domestic sphere and facilitate women to become more enlightened companions to their husband. The cultural nationalists shunned away from any intervention in their domestic lives. They argued for strengthening of Indian traditions. But what is interesting to note is that both these stands were clued-up by the idea that 'women act not as individuals but as members of the families' (as cited in Rege, 2003).

The concept of motherhood that was employed to distinguish the West from the East. The exaltation of motherhood ideal had a great influence on the ideological control over women. The glorification of womanhood rested on her reproductive function. This helped in keeping women out of the rights like education and profession and even when they were made accessible to them they were enfolded in the ideology of caring and nurturing. The image of a spiritually powerful woman rested on her position of economic dependency. Chatterjee argues that women were assigned a new social responsibility which was essentially linked to a higher goal of attaining sovereign nationhood. In this manner, 'the nationalist ideology bound them to a new, yet entirely legitimate subordination (Chatterjee, 1993).

motherhood was central to the structural configuration of the family and was branded by a patent contradiction that is linked with patriarchal domination, i.e. 'glorification without empowerment'. Thus 'glorification of motherhood co-existed with her low status in social structure' (Sinha 2012, p. 111). The primary desire of nationalists, revolutionary terrorist and communists was to strip women of the sexuality linked with them. This was to be done either by complete de-sexualization in the form of ascetism as talked by Gandhi, or by means of domestication and subjugation, as reflected in the communists' predilection for women activists who were married to male activists (Kumar 1993, p. 94).

#### **4. Masculinity and Nationalism**

It has been discussed above that how women's body and femininity is important for the nation building. Now not only femininity (or womanhood) but masculinity (manhood) is equally and important for the existence of nationalism. Sinha argues that histories of masculinity can be- and, indeed should be- more fundamentally about relations of power: a network variously crisscrossed by hierarchies of race, class, caste, gender and sexuality, masculine identities were constructed in relationship to other men no less than to women (as cited in Gupta, 2012, p. 42). It shows that not only femininity is relational but masculinity too is depending on the context.

McClintock points out that since the nation has been constructed as the 'hegemonic domain of both masculinity and heterosexuality', it serves as an instrument for the institutionalization of gender differences. Nation has been figuratively reckoned as a family and as such has attained a patriarchal order within which members are allocated separate roles in accord with their gender- as in the patriarchal family (Mayer, 2000, p.14). In a similar line Ann Fausto-Sterling (1995) in her essay "How to build a man" emphasizes that "men are made, not born" and that masculinity is construction of social discourse. The normative male behavior is dependent on prevailing social relations and on the social code that encodes these relations. Hence, the expression of masculinity will be subject to the image that men have of themselves in relation to women, community, society and the nation (as cited in Mayer, 2000, p.14).

Some scholars have attempted to articulate the meaning of manhood in negative terms - what men are not. These definitions include a separation from and repudiation of femininity: being a man is not being a woman, and no man would ever want to be a woman, or being a man is not acting 'feminine' and/ or not being a homosexual (Nagel, 2005, p. 114). The manly virtues defined by Mosse as 'Normative Masculinity' includes "will-power, honor, courage, discipline, competitiveness, strength, stoicism, adventurousness, independent, sexual virility, tempered with restraint and dignity" (Nagel, 2005, p. 113). These normative definitions of masculinity and femininity emphasizes on ideals but they are actually limited because their emphasis on ideals excludes many members of the society. It excludes very clearly those who do not fit into these ideals, for example eunuchs and also many men and women who do not behave according to the norms of manhood and womanhood.

## 5. Masculinity, Femininity and Nationalism

Here I want to put a very simple question that -Why we are afraid of homosexuality or so called 'illegitimate sexualities' (as society and state perceive them). Why are these sexualities seen as threats to a nation? There is no particular answer for these questions but still these threats come from our patriarchal mindset. Homosexuality is considered to be a threat to patriarchy and patriarchal notion of patrilineal traditions (*Vansh Parampara*), because it challenges the rule bound, essentially performative, reproductive, normative and legitimate form of sexualities on the bases of which we represent ourselves as nation or a community with an established set of a particular culture, different from others.

Many theorists of nationalism have noted the tendency of nationalists to liken the nation to a family. It is a male headed household in which both men and women have 'natural' roles to play (Nagel, 2005, p. 122). In the intersection of nation, gender and sexuality, the body becomes an important marker – even boundary- for the nation. In this association between masculinity and femininity, men (and sometimes older women) control the "proper behavior" of a woman, in effect they control women's bodies and sexuality. Women's bodies are considered to be emblems of the purity of the nation and thus are protected by men; assault on these bodies becomes an assault on the nation (Mayer, 2000, p.17-18).

The nation is defined as family and women are the symbol of moral purity of this family in which women's role is to reproduce the nation physically and symbolically and the role of men is to protect and defend the family or nation. In other words, since women as mother, daughter and wives are bearers of masculine honor therefore "women's shame is the family's shame, the nation's shame, the men's shame (Nagel, 2005, p. 122-123). Women's sexuality is not only symbolic to nationalism but presents a potential threat to the nation. RadaIvekovic and Julie Mostov explain that the rape and violation of individual women becomes emblematically weighty in nationalist discourse and the politics of national identity as a defilement of the nation and an act against the collective men of the enemy nation. It is the predicament of "our" women that portends or affronts the nation (RadaIvekovic & Mostov, 2004, p. 11).

In nationalist discourse, this masculine honour is associated to or is a contrast to a particular kind of female sexuality which is "procreative sexuality" and which also needs to be legitimate within the bounds of marriage limited by caste and community boundaries (Menon, 2007, p. 33). Honour killings, prostitutes (considered as fallen women) and lesbians challenge the patriarchal notion of honor and legitimate sexuality and that is why they are being penalized by our patriarchal social- political arrangement.

Partha Chatterjee has argued that a key moment in the struggle for freedom occurred when nationalists silenced the debate on women's question. He however points out that this silence was not the result of an agreement on woman's question between the nationalists and the British but rather reflected the refusal of the nationalists to make that issue the subject of debate with the British. While the nationalists accepted Western superiority over in "material outer sphere" and the need to learn from the British but asserted the superiority of their nation in the spiritual or inner sphere. This inner-outer distinction was fused with the distinction between the home and the world. Women were the embodiment of home. Thus, the identification of social roles by gender was to match with the separation of social space into the *ghar* and *bahir*. Chatterjee points out that while Indians pursued science, technology, rational economics, and Western political forms but they considered home as the basis of 'true identity that needed protection and strengthening and not transformation' (Chatterjee 1993, p. 120). By making a distinction between the home and the world, nationalists regarded home as the 'insulated private sphere' in which masculinist control over women was well-established. It is also needs to be understand that in the distinction of *ghar* and *bahir* the home was not just the representation of the spiritual but rather an arena of material significance to men as it provided unpaid labour and the services of women. Women's body also becomes the symbol of Indian nationalism. When on the one hand male body was emasculated by colonialism through the tedium of western education, office, and forced urbanization; and with the loss of traditional sports and martial activities and on the other hand, the female body was still pure and immaculate, faithful to the decree of the *shastras*. This 'purity' becomes both a sign of difference and of superiority to western culture thereby establishing a Hindu claim to power (Sarkar, 2001, p.41-43).

This inner/outer construction of identity and to protect the inner world from outsiders is something which represents the women as boundaries of the nation and bodies play an important role to construct, reconstruct and preserve the otherness or uniqueness of a particular nation.

## 6. Body and the 'Other'

Women's body and sexuality play important roles and are controlled for the formation of nationalism. Not only are they symbolic to nationalism but reproducers of national boundaries and national honour of masculine or men's nationalism. This section focuses on how body plays an important role in the construction of "us" versus "them" specifically in colonial times.

Edward Said's work (*Orientalism Reconsidered* 1986, and *Representing the Colonized* 1989) emphasized that the body

was a central trope of colonial discourses that constructed difference between the west and the non – west. This difference emphasized the superiority of the former and the inferiority of the latter and legitimated colonial rule through the logic that the superior necessarily dominates the inferior. Non-western bodies were portrayed as weak, barbarous, unclean, diseased or infantile in comparison with the idealized bodies of the west, which were the opposite that is strong, ordered, hygienic, healthy and mature (as cited in Mills & Sen, 2004, p.1).

This construction of the mirror image of others as the opposite of oneself becomes an element in civilizational, national and personal esteem (Rudolf & Rudolf, 1967, p. 1). For example whites making claim that black people are sexually immoral and black men were “hypersexual” and that they were driven to rape white women. With this claim Whites were not just maintaining a moral boundary but were using charges of sexual immorality to maintain a racial boundary as well (Fischer, 2011, p. 42).

Indian nationalism develops in reaction to British imperialism specially, in reaction to the powerlessness, which they experienced during colonialism. As British challenged their masculinity, Indian men emphasized both control over their own bodies and control over Indian women’s bodies – through body building and celibacy and through controlling Indian women’s sexuality. Nationalist discourse, built around the intersection between nation and masculinity, has focused on protecting women and especially, their sexuality from assaults by foreigners (Mayer, 2000, p. 14-15). This also include the assertion of control over one’s own body as a way of rejecting the alien forces of colonialism, secularism and modernity has been an important component of men’s nationalism in India. The best-known example is Mahatma Gandhi’s celibacy- a self-control that he believed translated directly into both public and private power. In an influencing article Joseph Alter argues that *brahmacharya* (celibacy) developed as a strategic concept opposed to westernization. Alter’s research on contemporary male wrestlers in Banaras and Dehra Dun, India, suggest that for many Indian men, practicing *brahmacharya* is a form of resistance against alien seduction. Yet purifying the body through celibate self-control is only one politics of Indian nationalism which works on the level of the body. Emphasizing sexual potency is another way that Indian nationalist have responded to colonialist discourses that have characterized Indian men as effete (Steve, 2000, p. 237)

This construction of the image of “other” or opposite identities is results of modernity or of new European knowledge systems which the British introduced. Orientalist discourse, census, law, new administration all contributed to categorize people into fixed identities and making sense to the people to construct their own separate spaces based on fixed identity. As Sudipta Kaviraj identify the “Fuzzy” and “Enumerated” community (Chakrabarty, 2002, p. 87) . He asserts that pre-colonial India represent the Fuzzy kind of community in which there was no fixed identity, individual was part of many communities at the same time. But the Britishers introduced new techniques to categorize people for better administration, and to rule over them. Ruth Vanita and Salim Kidwai’s work shows that alternative sexuality or multiple sexualities already existed in the Indian society. But fixed notions of masculinity and femininity were a result of the forces of colonialism and interactions between colonial and colonized culture

Orientalist discourse which begins in 1757 operates to reconstruct ‘knowledge’ of India. What concern us here is the fact that orientalism worked to condemn or marginalize what now are designated as dissident genders and sexualities, as it reconstituted and redefined the Hindu symbolic and ignored the vast array of sources that accept or even celebrate queer within their own categories of Great Tradition and Little Tradition. Some examples are the Kamasutra (AD fourth to fifth century) which include a chapter entitle ‘Auparishtaka’ (oral congress) valorizing same sex relations ; lesbian folk tales from Himachal Pradesh (Thadani 1996) ; practices such as *maitrekarar* (friendship agreement, a form of marriage between women) ; and iconography such as in Tara- Taratini temple of Orissa (as cited in Srivastava, 2013, p. 125)

The image of ‘Mother India’ was central to the discourse of Indian nationalism. Many young nationalists engaged in worship of Kali, Durga and Chandi and it was believed that ‘mother’ would ease the path to nationalist martyrdom. The ‘mother goddess’ was branded by many with ‘mother India’. Bankim Chandra in Anand Math wrote: ‘it is your image we worship in the temples’. A journal named *Suprabhat* was started by Kumudini Mitra in 1907 in which the correlation between revolution, mother Kali and mother India was reiterated. A poem titled ‘The Auspicious Time for Worship’, was published in the second issue of the journal which held that the ‘mother’s hunger’ would only be satisfied by ‘blood, heads, workers, warriors, heroes, labour, firm vows and bands of followers’ (Kumar, 1993, p. 45).

The correlation of Durga with ‘Mother India’ and mounting use of Kali to endorse violence in the freedom struggle can be considered as ‘turning the threat contained in these figures away from the self (of the Hindu Male), and directing it instead against the ‘other’ of Western colonizer’ (Kumar, 1993, p. 48).

## 7. Conclusion

This paper argues that belief of nation or nationalism in homogeneity and commonality is inconsistent to the existent materiality. It also emphasizes that control over women’s sexuality is only one way of projecting the nationalism in indigenous terms. As Ruth Vanita and Salim Kidwai’s work shows that alternative sexuality or multiple sexualities

already existed in the Indian society. But fixed notions of masculinity and femininity were a result of the forces of colonialism and interactions between colonial and colonized culture.

The point here is not simply the regulation and surveillance of women's sexuality that has long existed in most cultural contexts and pre-modern states. Rather, it is that this regulation and surveillance carries the weight of the modern state acting on behalf of national interests, and with the force of national culture and values. Clearly, then, there is not a single strategy for the inclusion of citizens of various sexual orientations into the national community. The mere inclusion, without substantially reimagining the national community, is insufficient, and then a relevant question is whether nationalisms can be imagined from a non-heterosexual or queer perspective. The moot question is whether there can be an "imagined community" of citizens that does not privilege heterosexuality or reproduce the problems of dual categories of sexual difference.

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